



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLES

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SAFETY
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*Testimony of Department of Motor Vehicles Commissioner Melody A. Currey
Transportation Committee Public Hearing
February 14, 2011*

Proposed H.B 6122

AN ACT AUTHORIZING NEWLY-LICENSED DRIVERS TO CARRY SIBLINGS AS PASSENGERS

Passenger restrictions during the early learning time a young driver first gets behind the wheel are critical. They are important to both learning to drive safely and to ensuring the actual safety and well being of passengers in the vehicle.

This finding was a result of the research work done in 2008 by the Governor's Task Force on Teen Safe Driving. It consulted experts around the country, including the Preusser Research Group of Trumbull, CT, which does research on behalf of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. David Preusser, research advisor to the Task Force, repeatedly pointed out that states adopting strong passenger restrictions were finding fewer deaths and crashes among these most vulnerable of our drivers.

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for 15- to 20-year-olds, causing roughly one-third of all deaths for this age group. Teenagers are overrepresented in traffic crashes both as drivers and as passengers. On the basis of miles driven, teenagers are involved in three times as many fatal crashes as all other drivers. The high crash-involvement rate for this age group is caused primarily by their lack of maturity and driving inexperience coupled with their overconfidence and risk-taking behaviors. High-risk behaviors include failure to wear safety belts, speeding, and driving while impaired (by alcohol or other drugs), and drowsy or distracted driving. This age group is particularly susceptible to distractions caused by other passengers in the vehicle, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's national studies. More teen fatal crashes occur when passengers, usually other teenagers, are in the car than do crashes involving other drivers. Two out of three teens who die as passengers are in vehicles driven by other teenagers, according to the NHSTA's report: Teen Unsafe Driving Behaviors, Focus Group Final Report.

Graduated driver licensing restrictions across the country continue to show the benefit of passenger restrictions. Connecticut has been at the forefront of safety for teen drivers following horrific crashes in 2007 that killed teen drivers and their passengers, including two siblings in the same vehicle from one family. The Governor's Task Force on Teen Safe Driving strongly believed that various research indicators, including crash reduction as a result of passenger restrictions as well as night-time driving restrictions, would lead to fewer crashes, injuries and deaths. Stepping to the forefront, it recommended and the Legislature adopted, a tough passenger restriction law, which included prohibiting carrying siblings in the vehicle during the time a teen holds a junior operator's permit and for the first six months a teen holds a provisional driver's

license. The recommendation of the sibling prohibition included the reasoning that any passenger regardless of relation posed a potential distraction.

Teens at 16 and 17 years-old are still learning how to react with maturity. Decision-making functions of the teenage brain are not finely tuned until about 25 years of age. Car rental companies understand this and that is why they refuse to rent their vehicles to persons under 25 years of age. There's no way to ensure that teens behave with more safety-mindedness behind the wheel when they have a brother or sister in the car. They need as much time as we can give to learn how to drive without injuring or killing others. The December Griswold crash killing several teen passengers in a car driven by a young teen with only a learners permit continues to show that passengers are at risk with young inexperienced drivers.

It's important to remember the successes these new laws have brought to reduce injuries and deaths from teenage car crashes. These tougher measures and training requirements that were adopted almost three years ago are beginning to have a positive effect. Teen drivers 16 and 17 years-old in Connecticut in the last two years have had the fewest number of fatal crashes in more than a decade, a recent analysis of federal reporting figures show. The state in 2009 saw a 62-percent reduction in fatal crashes involving this age group of drivers when examining a 12-year average since 1997. In the 2009 calendar year the number dropped to 6 for all of that year. Connecticut's comprehensive program tougher laws, restrictions, penalties and fines for teen drivers is a model that we all can be proud to show is working.